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Build pipelines to combat climate change

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Body

Westerners are deeply concerned that a minority Liberal government, beholden to other parties for survival, will wreak yet more havoc on a beleaguered energy industry. That would be exceedingly unfortunate, since Canada has an opportunity both to contribute to the battle against climate change and enrich its economy, create jobs and heal the rupture to national unity.

How can such a miracle be achieved? Through the construction of oil and gas pipelines and the export of fossil fuels to overseas markets. Public skepticism regarding such a claim will be understandable, since we have been bombarded with dire warnings that the oilsands are a major source of greenhouse gases (even though they represent a minuscule one thousandth of the global total) and therefore menace life as we know it. Fortunately, this miracle does not require divine intervention.

Climate alarmists frighten credulous adults and terrify children with panicky predictions that, unless GHG emissions are significantly reduced within 12 years, humanity will confront a catastrophic and irreversible increase in global temperatures. Every country and indeed every individual has a moral obligation to help prevent that calamity. The prime minister, like a modern-day biblical prophet of doom, incessantly propounds the apocalyptic prophesy, most recently during the election campaign. A cynic might think he is partially motivated by partisan politics.

In spite of the looming Sixth Extinction, emissions keep rising because global energy consumption is forecast to grow by nearly 50 per cent between 2018 and 2050. To compound the problem, some countries export their carbon footprint. For example, the United States reduced domestic emissions by substituting natural gas for coal and then exported coal to less environmentally conscious countries. The result is a net rise in global emissions. This is called carbon leakage - an increase in CO₂ in one or more countries as a result of emissions reductions by another country.

We need to consider the counterintuitive corollary of carbon leakage, namely, the substitution effect. If Canada were able to build pipelines to the west and east coasts, it could export its oil and gas to Asia and Europe. The importing countries would reduce reliance on coal, which generates double the emissions of natural gas and roughly 40 per cent more than fuel oil. While Canada's domestic emissions would rise, global emissions would decline on a net basis, thereby contributing to the fight against global warming.

Global emissions are what count, since we are dealing with a planetary issue. According to the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, by 2040 about 1,500 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions could be eliminated annually if natural gas were substituted for coal in Asian power plants. That would be equivalent to about four Canadian LNG plants.

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Carbon leakage applies to a broad range of industries. Vancouver-based Navius Research concluded that Chinese aluminum production emits seven times the CO₂ compared with production in Canada. Imposing taxes and regulatory penalties on Canadian aluminum producers that reduce their production undermines the global climate effort.

Under the Paris accord, there is a sensible multilateral effort to enable countries to share offset credits. It's called "Internationally Transferable Mitigation Outcomes." To date the effort has not been successful.

In the meantime, Justin Trudeau and his Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, Catherine McKenna, brag about their empty promises instead of genuinely addressing a crisis they claim is urgent. Either they do not believe their own alarmist rhetoric, despite what they have been telling Canadians every day of their mandate, or they are willing to give priority to partisan advantage over the future of their children, which would be unconscionable. Moreover, their policies have damaged the economy, devastated the energy industry and produced smouldering Western alienation, all while supposedly putting the environment first.

Hypocrisy is not the sole purview of the feds. Quebec Premier François Legault rejected the Energy East pipeline because there is no "social acceptability" to transporting "dirty energy" across Quebec. Yet his high-minded principle does not apply to oil from the Saudi Arabian theocracy, delivered by tankers up the St. Lawrence River. Then there is the eco-obsessed B.C. government that opposes Trans Mountain but whose largest export commodity is coal, making it the largest coal exporter in North America.

Canada is beginning an indeterminate period of minority rule that seems bound to prioritize green policies. We urgently need to confront the profound disconnect between an allegedly existential threat of global warming and policies that are ineffective and frequently undermine green goals, all at great cost to current and future generations.

This contradiction will endure until the public understands that building Canadian pipelines would mitigate global warming by reducing the massive use of coal in China and India. That calls for political leadership. Until then, logic, science and the facts will be no match for fear-mongering, group-think and relentless propaganda.

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